

“It Will be Revealed by Fire”

1 Cor 3:10-17

Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly

As we consider our passage this morning, let us not forget the larger context in which the passage is found. Is context important?

This passage has been used perhaps more than any other to place upon believers a sense of guilt and failure in their service to God. It is carried like a biblical club to keep the people of God busy and in line lest they lose their rewards and stand before God ashamed for their lack of obedience and embarrassed of their failures. The outcome of such thinking is nothing short of bondage. Such thinking shapes one’s view of the doctrine of imputation, substitution, identification, adoption, redemption, and propitiation, the human will, and divine sovereignty. None of which are minor or secondary. None of the previous thoughts are really disputed. They can be misunderstood and misappropriated, but we know what they mean and the significance of it.

The church in Corinth had divided over individual leaders, leaders who are only tools used by God. He assures them that only God matters (3:7) and such divisions over people are childish and infantile (3:1-4). In the paragraph before us (1 Cor 3:10-17) the apostle Paul is addressing leaders within the church such as Apollos, Cephas, and himself (1:12). He is not addressing the individual Corinthians. The people of Corinth are the material being used by the master builder in the building of the Church.

I. The foundation (vv. 10, 11)

Paul is identified by the word architect. God had entrusted to Paul the blueprints for building the church. Paul went into areas and laid the proper foundation that is sourced only in Jesus Christ.

A. It is essential

You cannot have a church that is not built on Jesus Christ.

B. It is extraordinary

There is only one foundation on which the church can be built. For us to engage in any activity that is not Christ-exalting, Word-centered, Global-impacting, and Grace-based is to miss the mark. We can become attracted to the good, but it will be at the expense of the best.

II. The building (vv. 12, 13)

A. The material (v. 12)

I cannot stress this point enough. 1 Cor 3:10-17 is dealing with the leadership in the Church, not the

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individual Christians within the church. Listen carefully to the following idea.

Again, it is important to keep in mind that Paul is addressing the leadership in the Church, people like Apollos, Cephas, and Paul. The gold, silver . . . hay and straw are the work of their hands. In fact, the people of Corinth are this work. **It is not the works of the Corinthians that will be judged, but the Corinthians themselves as they are the building built on the foundation of Christ by those who labored among them as their spiritual leaders.** The idea is one of perseverance, not performance.

When we embrace a man centered message, we are building with “wood, hay, and straw.” When we embrace a Christ centered message, we are building with “gold, silver, and precious stones.”

B. The inspection (vv. 13-15)

Verses 14 and 15 tell us that a “Pastor’s” work will be evaluated by God and based on whether or not the work survives will determine whether or not the “Pastor” will receive a reward for that area of service or whether in that area he suffers loss.

No church leader as a Christian should fear of having no reward, but it is possible for a leader to labor in vain (Gal 2:2, 4:11; 1 Thes 3:5). When the work is evaluated and found to be true, that in itself is the reward (1 Thes 2:19, 20). Consider the same idea in Phil 2:14-16 and 4:1.

If one labors all their life and builds a “Church” on a foundation other than the Lord Jesus Christ, then the “Church” will not survive the judgment, but the individual laborer will. Because the “Church” did not make it through the fire, and because the “Church” is the reward, he will not receive a reward.

C. The warning (vv. 16, 17)

Verse 16 turns the attention away from the leadership and to the people of Corinth. They are God’s field (3:9), they are God’s building (3:9), and they are God’s temple (3:16). Some within the fellowship were divisive, disgruntled, and disagreeable (1:10, 11, 3:3). As such they were destroying the Church. As such God will destroy them when the judgment comes (3:13-15). They will not survive the “fire.” Why will God destroy them, because they are endeavoring to destroy God’s Church and His Church is holy.